

CARRIE SMITH

*confessin' the blues*

# C a r r i e S m i t h

## CONFESSIN' THE BLUES

1. CONFESSIN' THE BLUES (4:36)
2. COUNTRY MAN (3:46)
3. MAMA (HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN) (3:35)
4. NOBODY KNOWS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT (2:22)
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*Carrie Smith • Vocals*  
*Doc Cheatham, Dick Vance • Trumpets*  
*George Kelly • Tenor Sax*  
*Budd Johnson • Tenor and Soprano Sax*  
*Eddie Barefield • Alto Sax*  
*Vic Dickenson • Trombone*  
*Billy Butler • Guitar*  
*Ram Ramirez, Hank Jones, Sir Charles Thompson • Piano*  
*Eddie Locke, Oliver Jackson, Panama Francis • Drums*  
*Al Hall, George Duvivier • Bass*

\* bonus tracks



PRODUCED BY: DISQUES BLACK AND BLUE  
 REISSUE PRODUCED BY: JERRY GORDON

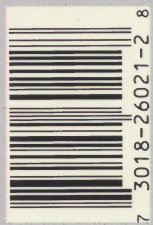
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TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 67:14



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ECD 26021

# Carrie Smith

## Confessin' The Blues

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“I’ve been around this kind of music all my life,” Carrie Smith told me one afternoon at her East Orange, New Jersey, home. “It’s not new to me.

“I was born in Georgia, but my family moved to Newark, New Jersey when I was about seven. Sarah (Vaughan) lived two blocks down from me. From my childhood, I was brought up in the church. My mother could sing. In fact, my whole family are good singers. And my father, he’s excellent! He was a Baptist minister.”

Bessie Smith was always a great favorite of Carrie Smith. “Oh, I knew about her because I had an aunt who used to have all of Bessie’s records; they were on 78s. And she would play these songs and I used to say, ‘Boy I wish I could sing like that one day.’ My aunt loved music, she loved to dance. She was my favorite aunt. And she’d play these records and I could see her doing the Shimmy. And she used to do the Black Bottom. And she used to tell me how she saw Bessie Smith on stage and what she’d have on, you know, and all these pretty clothes and everything. So I would play the records and I learned how to sing *Good Old Wagon* from listening to those records. Then I really got into Bessie because I loved her voice.

“My aunt was a barrelhouse mama. My uncle played piano like (blues pianist Little Brother) Montgomery. He was tall, handsome, and all he did was play for house-rent parties. And then I had another uncle who played guitar — like Leadbelly, blues and stuff like that. But my family — boy, they were all musically inclined!

“I started singing in church, the Abyssinian Baptist Church on West Kenny Street in Newark, New Jersey. And I stayed there for many years, from the Little Folks Choir to the Gospel Chorus,” Smith recalled.

“And I also had a little old Gospel group. In fact, Dionne Warwick — this was back in the ’50s, before she became famous — and her sister, Dede, have sung background for me on Joe Bostic’s TV show. They’re from East Orange.” Smith was still in her teens when she made her television debut, on Bostic’s WOR-TV show, **Gospel Time**, in 1957. That same year, she also made her recording debut, singing with the Back Home Choir at the Newport Jazz Festival, a performance that was recorded “live” for Verve Records.

“Gospel has always been my love,” Smith noted. “Because everything I sing, you can hear that Gospel in it. And anything that a musician plays, you can hear the blues in it. I don’t care how far

out they try to go — that blues has to creep in there somewhere.” She listened to much more than just Gospel while growing up, of course. She listened to pop music and Rhythm-and-Blues. “I was still in school when Ruth Brown was doing *Mama (He Treats Your Daughter Mean)*,” she recalled, citing Brown’s blockbuster R&B hit of 1953 (which Smith herself sings on this CD).

Through the years, Smith listened to a wide range of song stylists, and she has acknowledged as influences not just Bessie Smith, but also such distinguished, jazz-influenced popular singers as Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Peggy Lee, and Dinah Washington, along with two older blues singers whose names will be less familiar to most contemporary readers: Victoria Spivey and Miss Rhapsody. “And of course I knew Mahalia Jackson. When she would appear at Carnegie Hall or someplace, our choir would sing background for her.”

Over the years, Smith has built up a good-sized record collection, with plenty of rare sides by old-time jazz and blues performers, which she showed me. “I do a lot of studying, listening. Like everyday I might play somebody.” She handed me an album she’d been listening to lately: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, whose swinging, Gospel-based singing was popular fifty years ago. And here was a record by Eva Taylor, billed in her prime as the “Queen of the Moaners.” And Smith has recordings of others, more obscure, like Blind Joe Taggart and the Delta Boys. And framed, hanging on the wall across from where I sat, I noticed an original 1920s 78 r.p.m. record by the “Empress of the Delta Blues,” Bessie Smith. Carrie Smith is trying to maintain the legacy of many of the pioneering jazz and blues singers. As she put it to me that afternoon: “I’m trying to hold up the banner, because the music is dying — you know that. And I’m one of the few women out here that’s trying to keep it going.”

After paying her dues singing at clubs ranging from Al Hirt’s in New Orleans to Jimmy Ryan’s in New York, Smith’s big break came when Dick Hyman selected her to sing Bessie Smith songs in a 1975 New York Jazz Repertory Company concert saluting Louis Armstrong. Hearing her put across *Cake Walking Babies From Home* in that Armstrong tribute made me a Carrie Smith admirer for life. The timbre of her voice was (and is) so pleasing. Her phrasing was right on the money. And there were subtle emotional colorations — a hint of weariness underlying the ebullience. Jazz critic-historian Dan Morganstern, whose carefully considered judgements are as trustworthy as anyone’s in the field, declared in the June 1977 **Jazz Journal**: “Carrie Smith carries off Bessie Smith more convincingly than any other singer I’ve heard.”

Smith recalled, “That concert was recorded live in Carnegie Hall. And George (Wein) took me to France — to the jazz festival — and I was a big hit in France, and from there I started going to all the different countries. I got to sing with people like Vic Dickenson, Eddie ‘Cleanhead’

Vinson, B.B. King, Hank Jones, Budd Johnson. I toured with Cab Calloway. And I've been going back to Europe ever since. When I go overseas, boy, they know who I am over there!"

For two years, Smith co-starred, along with Ruth Brown and Linda Hopkins, not to mention superb tap dancers Bunny Briggs and Savion Glover, in the talent-packed Broadway musical hit **Black and Blue**. Because that show marked Ruth Brown's comeback after years of obscurity, much of the press coverage focused on her. I remember going to interview Brown for the **New York Post** and her asking me, "Can't you write a story about Carrie Smith? She really deserves a lot more attention than she's gotten!" That's the only time I ever recall a performer requesting I give coverage to someone else. Brown was right, though — Smith does deserve more attention than she's gotten to date.

This CD brings together recordings by Smith, made for the French label Disques Black and Blue, that have hitherto been hard to come by for most Americans. These casual, loosely swinging studio recordings of old jazz, blues, and R&B favorites capture Smith as you might have heard her on the festival circuit. She sings honestly, without affectation. It's interesting to note the variety of material in her repertoire — a lot of history is covered. *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out* and *St. Louis Blues* were memorably recorded by Bessie Smith, among others; *In The Dark* was first sung by Lil Green; *Confessin' The Blues* was initially a hit for Walter Brown and the Jay McShann Band; *Ill Wind* was successfully recorded by both Lena Horne and Maxine Sullivan; *When I've Been Drinkin'* has been a favorite of Big Bill Broonzy and Jimmy Witherspoon, among others; and so on. Although some of these songs, like *Careless Love*, were first popular long before Carrie Smith was born, she sounds like she was born to sing them.

The instrumentalists all get their say, too, which adds much. It's worth noting that, back in the 1920s, Doc Cheatham — who is heard on some of these sides and who has often accompanied Carrie Smith — accompanied Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. He has great respect for Carrie Smith's talents. And, in her field, one could not ask for a better endorsement.

— Chip Deffaa

Author, **Swing Legacy** (Scarecrow Press)

**Voices of the Jazz Age** (U. of Ill. Press)

and **In The Mainstream** (Scarecrow Press)

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1. **CONFESSIN' THE BLUES** (4:36)  
(Jay McShann-W. Brown)
2. **COUNTRY MAN** (3:46)  
(Kirkland-Thomas)
3. **MAMA (HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN)** (3:35)  
(Wallace-Lance)
4. **NOBODY KNOWS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT** (2:22)  
(Cox)
5. **ON REVIVAL DAY** (3:49)  
(Razaf)
6. **WON'T BE LONG** (3:34)  
(McFarland)
7. **I WANT A LITTLE BOY** (8:22)  
(Mensher-Moll)
8. **TROUBLE IN MIND** (4:05)  
(R.M. Jones)
9. **SAINT LOUIS BLUES** (2:41)  
(W.C. Handy)
10. **IN THE DARK** (5:08)  
(Lillian Green)
11. **ILL WIND** (5:34)  
(Arlen-Kohler)
12. **WHEN I'VE BEEN DRINKIN'** (4:09)  
(William Broonzy)
13. **DEED I DO** (2:30)  
(Rose-Hirsch)
14. **CARELESS LOVE** (5:20)  
(Handy-Williams-Koenig)
15. **DO YOUR DUTY** (2:50)  
(Wilson)
16. **EVERYBODY LOVES MY BABY** (4:12)  
(Williams-Palmer)

**Carrie Smith** • Vocals  
**Doc Cheatham** • Trumpet (11-16)  
**Dick Vance** • Trumpet (11-12)  
**George Kelly** • Tenor Sax (1-10)  
**Budd Johnson** • Tenor and Soprano Sax (11-12)  
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**Eddie Locke** • Drums (1-10)  
**Oliver Jackson** • Drums (11-12)  
**Panama Francis** • Drums (13-16)  
**Al Hall** • Bass (1-10)  
**George Duvivier** • Bass (13-16)  
**Buddy Tate** • Arranger (11-12)

Recorded at Condorcet Studio, Toulouse, April 23, 1977 (Tracks 1-10)

Miraval Studio, France, July 19, 1977 (11-12)

Barcelona, Spain, July 26, 1976 (13-16)

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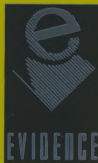
**Art Direction:** Imageworks

Selections 10, 13 and 14 previously unreleased.

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